

Gandhi : Reminiscing the man, forgetting the ideals.

"Break all my idols, renounce all my postures and name the streets after someone else". Gandhi whispered in his ears. He stood there stunned, wondering if Gandhi was serious. Gandhi understood his confusion. He smiled and said "If you want to remember me, keep me in your heart, and remember what I taught you". This scene from the famous movie Munna Bhai MBBS raises many pertinent questions.

What was Mahatma Gandhi trying to convey? Did he believe we had forgotten his teachings? Did he think we had idolised him ~~more~~ and not his principles? In this essay we will try to find answers to the above question. What is the reality of Gandhian ideals in 21st century India.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi brought India to freedom. He is credited with the relative peaceful nature of his movements and agitations. His extraordinary ability to unite masses. An orator for excellence. It is no secret why he is the father of our nation. And

As fathers are highly revered in societies.
He is dearly loved by the Indian people.
He envisaged a free, fair, just nation.
with people who will be full of love and
peacefully coexist.

Despite the numerous lessons Gandhi
ji taught us, what we witness in society
is a far cry from his vision. He famously
stated that love and tolerance are the
panacea for successful nations. Even a
casual look at India today will show the
spread of intolerance in society.

An intolerance to diversity, resulting
in deaths for different eating habits.
Brutal atrocities against anyone who
refuses to chant "Jai Shree Ram".
Innocent youth lives such as those of
Tabeez Ansari lost, only to suffer injusti-
ce even after death. Surely a situation
that would sadden Bapu if he were
alive.

This wave of intolerance has permeated
other sections of society as well. Gandhi
ji had stated for laws, rules to be
protected for improving conditions of
agrarian areas. What was envisaged as
law protection, has turned into law
vigilantism. With innocent people being
framed and brought to "justice" by

mob. Akhilesh and Pehlu Khan's lynching is a grim reminder of how Gandhi's ideals have remained mere words now.

While Mahatma Gandhi propagated the above principles, it was truly his efforts at creating harmony between hindu, muslims that stood out. He was persistent against partition and it broke his heart to witness communal violence. A recap of the horrors of 1947 can be seen in modern day India now. From the exodus of muslims from Muzaffarabad in 2013 to every day targeting of minorities, the reality is only grim.

A sovereign, secular nation was the dream of every Indian at Independence, but events such as demolition of Babri Masjid put a dent on India's secular credentials. Gandhi truly believed that harmony in society could be created through community living and developing the smallest level of governance - the villages.

Many schemes have been named commemorating Gandhi → most importantly the one for rural employment guarantee. But what really is the truth about rural India? Unfortunately Indian villages are facing a severe agrarian crisis. Despite 25 years of 73/74th constitut-

ional amendment, no effective empowerment of villages are witnesses.

Rural was still surviving only on 5 kg of rice and wheat even after 70 years of independence. Agricultural incomes are at an all time low due to agrarian crisis.

The dream of Gandhiji for villages to be "self sufficient village republics" has only remained a dream sadly.

Gandhiji's ideals of villages for was for society to be equitable, for Harijans to be respectable members. Yet horrific incidents such as Dada Bhai Phule and Bhimrao Patil strike at our conscience. And make us wonder have we really let our Bapu down?

Definitely all is not lost, we Indians may proudly celebrate Gandhiji Jayanti every 2nd of October. Follow his ideals of abstinence by declaring a dry day. But what entails rest of the year? Youth from Punjab are severely addicted to drugs, it is said to have ruined an entire generation. Issues emanating from alcoholism are as common as day and night. What use is symbolism of "dry day", if we are unable to instill important moral values in youth.

On the same line Gandhiji had famously stated that "Earth has enough for every one's needs, but not everyone's greed".
Aas! only ~~so~~ if we had listened. Floods, Droughts, Heatwaves are all a way of mother nature expressing her fury. We have ruthlessly exploited fossil fuels and our never ending greed has exacerbated climate change.

Increasing global climates, melting glaciers, extinction of species are all a testimony to the fact that we have forgotten Gandhiji's ideals. We don't have to travel far to see the impact, the water crisis faced by India is an example. Rows of women can be seen in Vidisha and Mathura, in scorching heat, clamouring for a single pot of water.

Mahatma Gandhi was very vocal about his ideas on equality for women. He made vast efforts to include women in freedom struggle. He strongly believed that girls are "Laxmi" and must be taken care of. While we still witness girls being burden on parents. Female infanticide is still widely practiced in Rajasthan and Punjab. It's a shame that those who give life to themselves denied the right to live.

If we move and take a look at modern, urban India things do not seem any better. Gandhiji had stated that "Knowledge without character is a sin" and this is played out in everyday life in urban areas. While access to internet has benefitted many, it has unfortunately resulted in cyberbullying and cyberstalking. Newer inventions such as plastics have created monsters in the form of waste.

Not only humans, but animals, marine species are facing death due to extensive use of single-use plastics. At this point it is a ~~very~~ worthwhile question to ask. Surely our leaders, who have inherited the political legacy from Gandhiji must be making efforts to amend the above.

Politics and principle were ~~to~~ two sides of the same coin but India has forced severe criminalisation of politics where law breakers have become law makers. ADR states 50% of MPs in Parliament have accusations of crimes against them. The Unnao rape case is a reminder of how those in power manipulate the system to benefit self rather than being justice to "dam dardmi".

We give Gandhiji the greatest respect by putting his picture on our currency. Yet the same currency is used to commit crimes, deny the weak their rights and silence the marginalised.

How can we create the glorious India that Mahatma Gandhi had envisioned? We must first move to actually empower our citizens. We have to move away from just reminiscing about Bapu to actually operationalising his ideals.

Our Directive Policies of state principles are a reminder of how much we cherish Gandhiji's ideals. We must start by strengthening our villages. Examples of villages such as Hivare Bazaar, have truly lived up to Bapu's ideals. Popat Rao Bhore encouraged each villager to contribute and work selflessly and managed to create a self sufficient republic.

Our reservation policies have benefited many SC/ST, but more needs to be done for their true emancipation. Ideals of Purity and pollution are being shunned through Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. It is a true implementation of Gandhian ideal of "Healthy mind, healthy body, healthy surrounding".

Gandhiji had taught us well his ideas of satyagrah and protest. India saw the largest protest against corruption in the form of "India against corruption" which led to the rise of people's party.

Also the freedom of speech that Gandhiji had fought for is being targeted, but the spirit of India's people, compels them to speak for their rights. Me too movement has raised debate over conduct of men in power, and raised demand for accountability of men's actions.

The single most important tool is education. Of children, of youth, of adults. To change attitudes, to implement rule of law. A national consciousness must be awakened, to take India to greater heights and rid her of all evils. Moral science, interfaith education must be made compulsory in schools.

"Sarv dham sthal" where people of all religions pray must be constructed. A spiritual conscience instead of a communal one must be promoted. The political parties on their part must move towards "Politics of cognitions". Gandhiji envisaged an India where

procession of Muharram would peacefully
move with procession of Gaurāti Vistjān.

While we as peoples must rise above our
differences and sectarian outlooks. Go back
to our roots and understand the beauty of
this land. Peaceful coexistence and harmony
must be made the order of the day,
with all stakeholders working towards
realising ~~idea~~ Gandhian ideals.

Perhaps this is exactly what Gandhiji
was trying to convey through in the
movie. It shouldn't matter if the man
is remembered or not, but his ideals
must live on forever.

Welfare's purpose should be to eliminate, as far as possible, the need for its own existence.

Sita left the house early morning to escape the brutal heat of the sun. She had to walk 5 km. to fetch water. On reaching the well she was disheartened to see a long waiting line. She had helped construct the well under the MGNREGA scheme, wages for which she was yet to receive. On her way back she decided to visit the PDS shop to collect her grains. Unfortunately the biometric machine had broken down that morning. Tired, she reached home but there was no respite as she had to collect the fire wood. Because she did not have money to refill the LPG cylinder, received under PM Ujjwala Yojna.

The above scenario is common to many households in India. Why is the situation so grave even after 70 years of independence? Why did she not receive the benefits of welfare scheme? Does it raise a question on India's socialistic credentials?

To answer the above questions let's travel back to 1947, India had just become an independent nation.

The people of the country were elated and dreamed of a glorious future. Our leaders, left no time in formulating welfare plans for their citizens. Mighty lofty 5 year plans were created.

Dams were declared as temples of modern India and PSU were to be the growth engine. The state decided to lead the welfare programs. These decisions were taken because, maximum Indians were living in poverty at the time. Agriculture was ruined by the British. Literacy among people was less than 15%.

Welfare was considered as a transfer of benefits from government to people while the ideas were very noble, they failed to bring any significant change in lives of people. Rural development plans ignored the main source of distress which was lack of land reform.

Money lenders still run the roost in rural areas. The situation of farmers got worse with time. Many slid into huge debts, some into intergenerational poverty. This led to farmer suicides a menace that 21st century India is still yet to solve.

Well intentioned welfare schemes such as NREGA suffered from many lacunae. It only provided temporary relief and no permanent solution to joblessness. Besides poor implementation drove people away from it, and in search of other work. Due to this there was also mass rural-urban migration.

Similarly the food security act has only promised rice and wheat. Children in India suffer from serious malnutrition and deficiencies. Not only this these welfare schemes have made citizens perpetually dependant on these government handouts.

The approach to welfare can be analysed to figure out the reason for failure of the same. People were always considered as only passive beneficiaries. State took a paternalistic role. While the bureaucracy in India suffered from a colonial hangover. All these factors put together never actually led to the true emancipation of the poor and down-trodden.

Following the same thought process. government decided to introduce Green revolution to ensure food security. But again it was limited

to affluent areas, as there was assumption of trickle down. Alas! the assumption was absolutely wrong.

Not only did the benefits not trickle down, they also created a huge divide between the rich and poor farmers.

Agriculture on which 48% of total workers are dependant failed to be remunerative.

The same faulty approach has also extended to providing subsidy to farmers.

Maximum was lost as leakage or gulped by middleman.

What ever was received was usurped by the rich. True welfare sadly never reached the ones who needed it the most. ~~But~~ Failure of these welfare schemes, increased the need for welfare among people. It drove people into a vicious cycle of dependency, from which there seemed no escape.

The pertinent question to ask is what could be the different reasons for this? Why could Indians not achieve their past glory? Well the reasons were many and vast ranging.

The welfare schemes were implemented in such a way that kept citizens completely out of the process. Unlike

Gandhiji, leaders of 21st century did not believe in the capacities of the people. On top of that our administration failed to reform. The "babus" could be seen working for their own benefit and maximising their own welfare.

This period is notoriously known as "Licence Permit Raj". The ideas for welfare were formulated in posh, AC offices ofutyens Delhi, completely oblivious to the harsh realities of drought, hunger stricken districts. Lakhs and lakhs of rupees were either pocketed or wasted, but never reached the poorest of the poorest.

While villages were envisaged to turn to self sufficient republics as stated in Balwant Mehta reports. This only remained on paper. Rural areas have continued to languish as before independence. Despite 73/74 Constitutional amendment act, panchayats possessed very little actual powers.

With no funds, functions or functionaries, panchayat and Gram Sabhas remain mere line functionaries. Added to this the top down attitude of central governments did not allow local levels to flourish.

True welfare is equivalent to empowerment which would create a situation where an individual is free from burden of welfare. Disheartening results of welfare failure is seen in use of misadism and demand for separation.

Governments and people in India needed to bring true empowerment to prevent a ghastly Balkanisation of the nation. The beginning for welfare must come from a radical shift in approach both of governments and people.

There is a need of a mental revolution to shift people from passive beneficiaries to active participants. Citizens and people must be at the core of all changes. The perfect example of the above approach is the success of self help groups in India.

Southern states such as TN, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh have succeeded in increasing household incomes. They have provided bank linkages. Women such as "Kisan Chachi" have helped create 100s of SHG even in northern states. Government must promote their spread and encourage women to even contest local elections.

It is widely understood that political participation is a powerful method of providing empowerment. In the same line reservations for SC/ST/ women at local levels have highly raised their status. Similarly the bill for reservation of 33% for women in Parliament must be passed. It will ensure that fruits of welfare reach 50% of the left out population.

At the lowest level Gram Sabha must be made the main unit of governance. A day can be set for regular meeting. The Gram Panchayat development plan is a good initiative to promote decentralised planning.

Other mechanisms to increase local participation & promoting community based organisations, NGO, civil society organisation to actively take part in governance. NGO — ~~Asst~~ Akshay Patra has greatly revolutionised mid day meal scheme. Taking this forward & multisector approach to scheme implementation would truly help in ~~not~~ empowerment of people.

The government must also stop being an ideal employee and aim to empower people to become job creators.

Policies such as Mudra yojana, Skill India, Start up, Stand up India are a step in the right direction.

To operationalise the above, it is pertinent to for governments to be transparent and highly accountable to people. In India, people are sovereign and hence demand a right over information regarding their welfare. RTI act, Citizen charters aim to achieve the same. Social audits in schemes such as MGNREGA have greatly empowered the workers.

In the fields of education, health ground level changes must be brought. Public private people panchayat partnerships are a novel introduction to healthcare services. Wellness centres under Ayushman Bharat must be audited by Panchayats. Such a mechanism will eliminate need for welfare inducements.

Education must be made a right from 3-18 years, so that each individual can reach their highest potential. It will reduce dropouts, poverty. People with good education will move towards better jobs, hence eliminating need for doles.

And lastly and most importantly there is a need for strong political will, for leaders to espouse dedication of JL Nehru, trust of Gandhi and intelligence of Ambedkar. For leaders to eliminate welfare needs itself and instead usher Indians into self sufficient, empowered human beings.

Imagine when Sita will get pipd water at home, so she can cook early and work more. The extra wages can help her to get a LPG connection. With good health she can raise healthy, happy children. This will be true purpose of welfare in India.